



St Aldhelm's October 14th 2017

Poems by Rogan Wolf

Suddenly the Universe

(sung)

That first-born breath
is the beginning of Time.
Suddenly the universe
falls into place
and all our sentences rhyme.

From star-dust we come
and to star-dust shall return
but suddenly the universe
falls into place
and all of life is re-born.

We spring from pain
to an immeasurable joy.
Suddenly the universe
falls into place
resolved in that infant cry.

*Rogan Wolf
February 06*

Where the Dim Light is

We and these old walls are kin
each of us conceived and sprung
from the first moments of Creation.
Our shapes and histories
reach behind us deep into this earth,
past where word can register
or limb find space,
down to a mere pinprick of matter,
chance compression of cell and wild energy
which simply refused not to be
and so is.
And up here and today
within these stubborn walls,
facing new weather, meeting new time,
here where the dim light is,
we seek to live, we seek to see.
Unknowable ancestors,
shadow beyond shadow,
hover about us, inseparable as dreams.

*Rogan Wolf
September 2017*

My way to you

I have forced a path through to your door
with no direction nor address.
Had there been a road to this place
I would never have found you.

It has taken a life-time
to make my way to you.
No lesser discharge
would have reached this far.

I never once
knew where I was going.
Now that I've got here
my disorientation is complete.

Here at your door
I find myself at last.
Here at your door
there is nothing left of me.

Rogan Wolf
December 2005

Waiting at Risk

Every room in the world -
the hall, this chapel, the ward, the cell -
each permutation of being in shelter
is a waiting room
an entry-port
a pause for the gathering of self
for a new phase of going further.
There's no real refuge
no relief from movement.

Here where we pause
offers no shelter.
In all our sanctuaries
we sit at risk. And here
we sit. And here always
is all that matters.

Our bright Earth
is a crowded waiting room
its roof unending,
pure, imperious.

It is awful to conceive
how many
have passed through here
and how many will follow.

*Rogan Wolf
Spring 2000*

St Aldhelm's Chapel

Chantry at dusk edge
ante-chamber to wrack far down
cold concert-hall for Summer bees

it stands square beside memorial globe
and stubby line of once poor homes
and a small tree sings to it

knotted by the sea wind.
Centuries on end
millenia on edge.

For the grieving father
and drift wood on the rocks
and the waves breaking

this song of dressed grey stone
damp shelter for pilgrim pause
poised cave.

Rogan Wolf
2008

St Aldhelm's at 60

The wind cuts when you're 60.

The walls have stood so long

you're bound to wonder how much

more they'll stand.

I made a pilgrimage to this place

on my birthday and looked out

over the waves

like the coastguard with binoculars

a few yards to my left

both of us intensely alert

awake only in passing

to the glory and calm of the winter sunset

dominating this moment.

Rogan Wolf
February 8th 2007

Edge

It's hard to bear a life all edge
its every moment leapt from a cliff.
You need to construct continuity
so say to yourself
tomorrow morning my bed
shall occupy the same
space it fills tonight.
But in truth I know
my bed will have swung
through half a world
and the universe sung
a billion new songs
and I shall have
been transformed
by every breath I breathed
and dream dreamed.

Rogan Wolf
Dec 3rd 2013

I Send Greetings from this Place

I send greetings from this place
to my neighbours across the water
I bid them welcome to my mind
I bid them welcome to our future

and I grieve that in the present
some people on this small island
have been bewildered and ill-led
into thinking water can be wall

and a little and invented “we”
can be a separate, better home
than true connection, I to thee,
each frail on a cliff-edge, sharing the sea.

October 2017

Homecoming

It's as if the landscape
has gathered you into its arms
making you
not just welcome here
but whole.

It has reached out and found
you where you alone
could not. You are never lost
among these contours.

They map your interior.

You are discovered here.

Rogan Wolf
April 20th 2016

Dorset in view

From above, this region is a quilt
of all colours, covering a vast
and restless sleeper ; each week
the colours have shifted, wrapped
in season. No rest here. No pause.

The tractor driver spends all the daylight hours
and more, lonely in his cab, changing
a field's colour inch by inch, precisely
row by row. A young deer, ears up and pointed,
grazes watchfully nearby, safest
at centre, sharply in view.

Rogan Wolf
October 2016

A Roman Engineer surveys the Downs

He stands on a ridge, a few miles inland.
Lush pasture close-cropped. Laden grey skies.
He throws his mind in a clean line
across the wide valley, its bunched cattle,
its burial mounds of bright chalk. He will string
ridge to ridge with his narrow band of stones.
It will run straight across the green folds,
the slow undulations,
pressed deep, stone by stone.
He grips the young land,
its soft arms and shoulders.
Cities will be born
Of this binding of line and curve.

Rogan Wolf
Spring 2014

Copper Beeches

(for Pat Boyden)

The tree's a harp, plucked
and pulled by the winds, a music
fierce and royal. The word "sough"
does not sing enough. The tree's true
voice is double bass, a thousand basses
in celebration. It is ocean ramping
through gravel on the shore. Two
copper beech trees stand proud
in a Dorset valley I know. Often
when young I climbed into the saddle
of one and then higher, to sway
in its mane. We rode the valley together
this beech and I, shy squire
on majestic stallion.

Rogan Wolf
February 2014

White Owl by Daylight

Seen through stark branches
crows cruising the bare furrows
stoop on a white owl

The white sky tightens
holes appear and one by one
become night all round

Is it these homing
in crows or, for being caught out,
the owl we should blame ?

Earth becomes all bare
black lines offering nothing
but a broken fall.

Who has stilled the song
I heard when owl abiding
ranged his palaces ?

A breast feather falls
and fades into the landscape -
the landscape takes flight.

Rogan Wolf
1975

Leaves upon Stone

I am leaving their names in this place
five who once drew breath with me
and answered when I called them.

Sophia Maria ! Yes ?
Peta Kim ! Yes ?
Mary Young ! Yes ?
Pixie Jenkins ! Yes ?
Pat Boyden ! Yes ?

*His voice I know
and hear and
yes ?
my own
strange voice goes out
and enters him.*

But now
they do not hear
their names called
and do not know me
nor say "I"
and did not see the sun rise
this morning -
even while still woven
and meshed in my flesh
my mind's mutter
and murmuring
the world of my wandering...

I am leaving their names in this place
this Autumn time.
Let them rest here.
Let them be written in the stones.
Let me leave them here
like Autumn leaves pressed
on these grey stones -

as also now they rise to me
and still they walk through time in me.

Rogan Wolf
Easter 2013

Centaur

We laid him on his side
shining in the dim light
his vast head tipped
towards the crown of the slope
the curved fury of his thighs
flattening the rough gorse of the combe.
And we left him there as a memory
of the glory of it all
the thunder and joy
of the mornings on the downs
when the rhythm was all one
and my eyes saw only what his eyes saw
and our ears heard nothing
but the onward ecstasy of his hooves.

Rogan Wolf
Sept 2011

Two poems by Tom Burgess :

Shy Light over Boat Mast

Shy light over boat mast
I am listening
Slowly unfurl your sonnet sublime
Sea shine sing with the romantics
Your voice is irresistible

The evening bounces on salt seductively
Beckoning to the strong arms of the Sea Gypsies
Who ferry paint for the Welkin
Pristine colour bound in barrels
Gleaned off the scales of fish
They plunge into deep red

I am submerged
I am pinned

The darker side of the itinerant life has its own beauty
I hesitate to escape, there I stay
A two faced god the Whales Way
As still as the scene around me I wrestle a memory
Trapped by the allure of adventure and sorrow
I am thinking longingly of someone who understood the
sacred
A rare and precious person
The greatest friend
A pirate, who danced with all things in deep reverence

He was a sunset
Ended life in a great collision of light and sea
Forever he will be a sea gypsy's tale

Tom Burgess

Revival

We are the climactic pivot of creation
if only we would join in
We do not need to be the heroes in creation
only join in

This blue dot hangs in the balance
Shivering for perpetually new forms of harmony
On the other side waits chaos of a dismal kind
We teeter on the brink of diminishing life
Seduced by homogeny
We are pointlessly surrendered to entropy
The natural home of stalemate

What we do matters
If we are not awake we distort the weaving of all things

We are substance in the scale of change
Choosing life means becoming a gift
Anticipating the new to allow the flow through

Together we matter
Our magnetic cross channels elevate a third way
awe, pulsing and synergy making movement possible
Together we widen the range of love

Tom Burgess

Interval

Hannah McClorinan on cello

Hannah will play

the Sarabande from Bach's Cello Suite No. 5

A poem by John McClorinan :

A Father to his Son

(with Down's Syndrome)

Through you I proclaim
the glorious gift of the verb 'to be.'

Profound in simplicity; in simplicity profound.

Saying what you feel, being as you are,
wonderfully irreverent, irrelevant,
inappropriate, spontaneous,
topsy turvey, upside down,
vulnerable, perceptive, aware,
eager to communicate, willing to please.

Asking only for time to love and be loved
to understand and be understood.

Polarising the community -
for most, bringing out the very best
for others, incomprehension, fear.....

You wrecked my career, challenged my sanity,
opened my senses, restored my humanity.
shattered my expectations.....

Like the Almighty you defy definition.
Ultimately Our Eternal Mother and Father
says to you, to Jesus, and to all,
"My child, I never intended
that this should ever happen to you !
But welcome home !"

John McLorinan

Kim and the Sea-gulls

(Kim had Down's Syndrome. This incident took place when she was in her early teens.)

You broke clear.
I do not know
what drove
you to spirit yourself
away.

In search of
more room
you ended up
on a cliff edge.

Where further
could you escape to ?

Frail
and at risk
on that blustery high
corner
you looked out
on miles of grey unrest
borderless peace

and took your clothes off.

I do not know what drove
you so to yield yourself
to the pure
flesh.

You felt pure
chill and turned blue.

And the sea-gulls
turned
as if for prey

and swooped
on you,
mobbing.

Someone found
you there -
eye of a storm
of sea-gulls,
blue
in a storm
of tears.

She brought you
safely home.

But I believe, my dear,
that you
went seeking
storm
that day.

Rogan Wolf

If I am already broken

If I am already broken
then I *can* be infinitely *light*

and need not fear
the loss of carapace,
or ties, or mooring rope.

If I am already broken
I can travel far, untraceable,
and I'm almost impossible to stop.

If I am already broken
I am *almost* unbreakable

and like a dandelion seed
almost impossible to stop.

Rogan Wolf
May 2011

Breaking

written on my 50th birthday

In middle age I've come to realise
that nowhere in existence holds more interest
than a breaking-point
a place of giving way.

For there before us
just visible, perhaps,
through a scum of hair-line fractures
is a glimpse of our redemption.

Soon fear floods the cracks again
and old shapes or new shapes -
it matters not in the least -
shield us from what we might have been.

But now I stare old age in the face
and beyond my decrepitude
I see my shadow
holding a scythe

and I say this
that from today
I'll gravitate to the breaking points
I'll merge myself with the giving way.

*Rogan Wolf
January 23rd 1997*

Words

What are words for ?
If to connect us
they have to be pristine
carriageways for truth-telling.
We have to tend and train our words
to be as sound and life-giving
as the Earth.

For like God
words stand at our mercy.
They can be twisted
to the vicious will,
turned
into mirrors of the corrupted self.

And those who would smash Creation
and burn and dismember our children
speak words
of terrible skill.

Summer 2015

Sayings

*Reaching for words
is like searching the earth
for stones
and then shaping them
one after another
into a path.*

Your words took my breath away.
They killed me with their song.
They made my womb turn over.
Sing to me again.

The words I must speak
will sentence me to death.
I believe this, not that,
and know that I shall burn for it.

My beloved spake and said unto me,
Rise up, my Love, my fair one, and come away.
For lo, the winter is past, the rain is over, and gone.
The flowers appear on the earth,
The time of the singing of birds is come,
And the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.

You believe *nothing*
they screamed, through the scarves
that hid their faces.
In praise of God
whom your words besmirch
we are about to make nothing of you
in one short burst.

I demand
freedom of speech
I demand the right to say
whatever I like
and do to the truth
whatever suits my purposes
and defraud my neighbour
in whatever way pleases me
through my words
for my gain.

We made the bus bright red, he said
in glee. So the plebs would think
that they and we
belong on the same side.

Tee hee.

Fiddle-de-dee.

The People have Spoken
and We must Obey.

Tee hee.

Your words
have cut me to the quick
they have cleaved me
from crown to crotch.
Split in two
I cannot live more.

Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.

On the last day, he said :
Tell my children that I lied
for their sakes.
I cheated on a people and a world
so that my own blood might flourish.
Though there be no world left
and the lie now rules,
my children will play in the sun
and I say
the People have Spoken,
I say, it is the People's Will,
but I and my children know
that it is *my* will prevailed.
In casting my spell
I stole their world.

Your words touch me
with such truth and delicious penetration
that my womb turns over.

I can tell a lie
by the way my flesh
crawls on hearing it
and a pillar of salt
replaces my free spirit
and my proud city
crumbles in ruin.

Our words cleared the air between us.
Both of us could breathe now –
not just the one.
We ceased
choking on each other.

Your words poisoned the atmosphere.
Faces fell and then froze.
A bubble of foam
escaped between green lips.

Words can mean whatever you make of them.
They can play people like hooked fish.
You reel people in with words.
Then you gut them.

Words fail me. I am lost for words.
Lord, retrieve me. I fail of my being.
I am overborne. I cannot break free.

Send me word
when you can, if you will.
I live on word. No word
no heart left beating.

You have been killing me with your song
so sweetly that I could have wished
my dying could last forever.

We made the bus bright red, he said.
Tee hee.
Fiddle-de-dee.
The People have Spoken.

Lord, I am not worthy
that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.

Red Squirrels on the Isle of Wight

The American grey squirrel was introduced into Britain in the nineteenth century. Since then, it has driven Britain's native red squirrel from much of the country with the striking exception of the Isle of Wight.

Their “redness” is actually pale fox
their ears taller, more pointed than the grey.
“Greys don’t feature on this island,”
he said, with a meaningful look,
the young man serving in the fine foods shop
with local rabbit and pheasant for sale
(though remember “beware of shot”).

After the first scutter off the path
their silent game got the better of them
and they let me watch
them sprinting up and down the various sides
of trees just metres away. I shall soon be 60
60 and these the first I’d ever seen.
Praise be for their beauty and their play
secured by the chance of a ring of tides.

Rogan Wolf

No Travelling Light

Once you're over 60
there's no travelling light.

You have all this baggage
attached to you,

clattering alongside
like a huge family of tins.

When sometimes I dance
my tins come dancing with me

and then hundreds of green gremlins
come tumbling out of the tins

onto the floor.
I glare at my gremlins

and they scream -
E-E-E-E-E-E-H !!!!

and scuttle back under cover.
My tinned gremlins and I

are going on a long journey together
travelling heavy.

from Reflections upon Stone

(i)

The beach is all stones.
None of them know
their neighbour. Each one
is different. Some
I find beautiful. None
of them know it. None of them
know what is happening
around them.

(ii)

What if stones dream ?

Would they dream

in colour ?

Would their dreams reach

into memory ?

Do stones remember

the Creation ?

Was the Creation

colourful ?

(iii)

I have heard a stone sing.

Its song tore at me
like a vulture's beak
breaking me down
replacing me
with eternity.

(iv)

Stone has no conscience.
Through millions of years
of light and dark
stone has done nothing
of which to feel ashamed.

(v)

You kick stone
you spurn it
you skim it across flat water
like a speed boat.
Stone suffers
all your maltreatment.
It knows beyond doubt
no stone no you.
We are all made
from one dust.

(vi)

Consider the options :
strike down
the tribal demon
for at least a generation ;
travel a few feet
down the beach ;
or settle a millimetre
further into the sand.

(vii)

I have seen stone
grow smooth.

I am so old
it is unbearable.

Rogan Wolf
2005

The Magpie

People dying
learn suddenly to sing
rhapsodies steeped
in grief.
But dying is what
all of us are doing
all our lives and the rhapsodies I mean
seem to come in the last days
of dying, as if only then
do we finally wake up. So is life
mostly for sleeping? I look out
at bare trees this morning, the wet
on them shining, caught aslant
by the sun. A magpie flaps
busily across the open green
scattering water.
This is the magpie's moment.
So is the next.
It is early and still quiet.

*Rogan Wolf
January 2016*

Word Play

May words work.
May mine
have looked you in the eye
and found you out
and worked on you right here.

Fraud and felon play
with words, seeking
only to deceive and buy
and force you to their will.

I must work a cleaner way
my words releasing you
to where you belong.

Words must truth-tell
sound the soul
make us well.

Rogan Wolf
September 2013